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Sweaty Mother Slow Groove

Devin Kylie Harclerode

Virginia Commonwealth University, harclerodedk@vcu.edu

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SWEATY MOTHER SLOW GROOVE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University

By

Devin Kylie Harclerode

MFA, Painting + Printmaking, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA,
2016

BFA, Painting, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, 2013

Thesis Advisor: Gregory Volk, Associate Professor, Painting and Printmaking
Department

Committee: Peter Baldes, Paloma Barhaugh-Bordas, and Gregory Volk

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ABSTRACT

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Sweaty Mother Slow Groove is an engagement in magical thinking that proposes a displacement of swamp methodologies into the virtual realm, existing during the fourth wave. In doing so the cyborg and goddess are united in a re-routing of essentialism and the neo-liberal domination of technology. The metaphorical swamp is the possibility of a mushy danger zone that harnesses the absorption of an unwanted space: a disintegration of the binary and the soft-coded awareness of the body as a process, not a site.

THE ALTERNATIVE ORIGIN STORY: SWAMP-TALK

The swamp is a place where juices simmer, where detritus and newness coexist in coactivity. A sinking site that lacks traditional stability and human trace, where traditional stability acts as a synthesized ecology of living: pouring in the foundation and setting binaries in stone: a politics of domination.

A swamp is cloaked in humidity, aka, water vapor stuck in the air, being dually experienced as atmospheric and physical. Upon entrance into the thick, your hair frizzes, sweat pools up, and dampness becomes a state of mind. In this heat, binaries are rejected through a celestial exercise in positive ambivalence. A swamp's waters are inbetween salty and fresh, river and lake. The water is dangerous in stagnancy and gracious in fertility, being consistently involved in a tannic panic that permeates several realms (the gators, pythons¹ and amoebas are lurking as the powers that be dream of draining). The tannins in the water reject the serenity of blue and instead reflect a righteous orange. The grounds are made mostly of muck, a gooey dark mass beneath, built-up through layers of wetness and detritus that stir up an enigmatic depth. One step is four inches deep, the second step is a foot. It is a sweaty mother, denying the binary of decomposition and reproduction, with the slowness of the space mashing it into a

¹ <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/attack-of-the-giant-pythons-862863/?no-ist>

complex mass. The cycle of life becoming less determinable as stagnant water becomes a breeding ground for bloodsucking.

What is most compelling is that the swamp appears to be an exercise in fluidity that we can invoke to transcend the rigidity that is mirrored in human architecture, drainage, and comfort. Rigidity is aligned with a civilized world that valorizes the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy,² and it is due time to be re-thought. Swamp power instills a slow grooving³ fight back. It recalls the phallic order that tried to tame it, and several historical examples exist to illustrate the strife.

Mexico City was built on a swamp and it is sinking, a *process* known as subsidence.⁴ Packed with heavy buildings as the water underground is pumped out, the Sidewalks are stretches of cracked, uneven slabs – infringing on your paced walk, and making room for diligence. You must notice your footsteps as the civilized structure does not go unchecked. The cathedral downtown, built in 1521 as a towering symbol of Spanish conquest has sunk faster than the rest of the city on top of the Aztec ruins. The lands of the city are breaking up with phallogentric colonialism, fighting down rather than up, a drowning.

² A term borrowed by bell hooks. I am defining the patriarchy as a contrived and pervasive origin to the civilized world: rigidity and dominance that moves vertically via oppression.

³ Slow grooving – an invented term that conjures sentiments of soft power, a groove is both a fissure that catches and a sensual double ‘o’ movement.

⁴ http://www.upi.com/Science_News/2014/12/11/Mexico-City-sinking-as-aquifer-exhausted/9531418321604/



In coastal Virginia, the Great Dismal Swamp is flanked by cotton fields and Confederate flags. Driving toward it, the lushness is tinged with white-male hunters who are ignorant about its history. The swamp is known for the “Washington Ditch” which was a colonial effort to drain the 40,000 acres in the hope of cementing a zone of trade and erecting farms. Despite the domination attempt, the project was eventually abandoned,⁵ and the swamp became a refuge for the oppressed: runaway slaves, Native Americans, and the shunned. An environ too

⁵ The questionable language of the welcome site for the swamp touts: “The foreboding swamp provided a natural refuge for runaways and fugitives.”

risky for the white men of the western world to search⁶ and conquer, but welcome enough for the other.

The largeness that is the Everglades in south Florida has seen years of manly friction. A guardian of the swamp, the mosquito bears itself in abundance in the Everglades (a bloodsucker and a small annoyance that packs a punch). A step into a swamp in the summer requires a constant flow of movement. To stand your body as static as a column means certain attack, the mosquitos cover every inch of warm-blooded stillness.

With the promise of god behind them, the early English settlers in Florida successfully drove out the Spaniards and thus pushed the Seminoles back toward the Everglades. The second Seminole war erupted through the vibrating radicality of Osecola. The “civilized” soldiers where racked with swampy hardship, a diary entry from General Alexander Webb in regards to his miasmic position reads: “April 13: No peace from mosquitos. ... Stayed up all night. ... Mosquitos awful. 1,000,000,000 of them. April 18: Mosquitos worse than ever. They make life a burden. April 19: I am perfectly exhausted by the heat and eaten up by the mosquito... they are perfectly intolerable.”⁷ Thus the richness of the swamp is swarm-

⁶ <http://dismalswampwelcomecenter.com/history/>

⁷ Michael Grunwald, *The Swamp* (Simon & Schuster 2007), 40 – 43.

ing.⁸ The colonizers were met with intolerable conditions, where the Seminoles thrived. The anecdote is a testament to the preference of the swamp, those who work with rather than against.



As the reputation for miasma pulls away (or rather the miasma is recalibrated in the positive), the swamp can be understood through a poignant relationship to the womb, to a woman, to reproduction, to fluidity, to heat, to wetness. The swamp could be the vaginal, in basic terms it is an instigator of reproduction (the mother + child) and a place for decomposition (the shedding of the uterine wall).

⁸ Natasha Ginwala and Vivian Zihlerl, "Sensing Grounds: Mangroves, Unauthentic Belonging, Extra-territoriality", E-Flux Journal #45 05/2013, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/sensing-grounds-mangroves-unauthentic-belonging-extraterritoriality/>

It is no secret that the history and breadth of the patriarchy has generalized women with nature, and men with mind. The fact that a woman's body reproduces through childbirth and (as a consequence of capitalism) laborpower, is used to de-legitimize her humanity and emphasize her relationship to nature or to the beast. In the language of the paternal: a woman moves with the tides, is a witch, aligned with serpent, and heated up. She speaks in fevers and simmers] with natural chaos. Resolutely, she is an object (born from the rib) of a man.

Feminism in the first and second wave acknowledged the myth of woman and man in an attempt to emphasize positive qualities of femininity apparent in ancient matriarchies.⁹ Separatist¹⁰ spaces that limited being a woman to genital nature¹¹ were fostered to forgo the male-oriented control of a woman's sexuality, her labor, her identity, her movements. And this was important, as women remained an object of the male class. However in doing so, womanhood risks becoming essentialized and neglects the complexities of race, class, and geography thus falling into a biological hole that fundamentally rejects autonomous change and fluidity. Simone de Beauvoir's anthem "...one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman," does not go unrecognized and thus the essentialist fear has been re-worked by feminists in the contemporary.

⁹ Ex: Amazons, Minoans, Celtic matriarchy

¹⁰ radical lesbian feminism

¹¹ See: *Transparent*, Season 2, episode 9: "Man on the Land"

Within this unraveling of the essentialist framework I propose a re-routing of the natural discourse that shifts reification from femininity to swamp-logic. A displacement of “womanhood” that circumvents the social implications of the phenomena of genitals through the adoption and metabolization of the swamp.

The application of the swamp model is a metaphorical premonition of an alternative way of living, with essentialism being destabilized. The displacement holds the possibility of a mushy danger zone that enacts the magic principle of harnessing the fluidity of an unwanted space and attempts to transgress and transcend the binary. This becomes a project and a call to embrace the oozing heat of a displaced womb and align with the body via telepresence. It is a suggestion to extend the swamp’s biopolitical importance into the realm of gender in order to challenge kyarchies¹² with the full frontal.

The introduced “newness” will be understood through a rhizomatic and poetic construction of reproduction, the cyborg-goddess hybrid, and the rejection of the body. The Sweaty Mother Slow Groove video reflects the aforementioned and explores the virtual swamp model through a fictional mythology that becomes the tenets of the essentialist displacement.

¹² A social system or set of connecting social systems built around domination, oppression, and submission.



I THE TENETS: SWAMP LOGIC I

The personal-as-political metaphorical disembodiment is populated by the characters of a poetic (in lieu of symbolic) language that makes up the swamp model. Examples of which are as followed:

SUN

The sun lurks - experienced equally through shadows as it is through warmth. In a swamp the sun is both ever present and hardly there, it shimmers through the mangroves beckoning an atmosphere of witchy folk-tale ritual (dancing naked in the unity of the firelight). The sun's alignment with patriarchal goodness is inverted.

HUMIDITY

Humidity puts the space in heat, frothing up from tannic water. It's sticky and cumbersome. The humidity runs through your blood stream causing your muscles to loosen and your bones to curve, a melty sensation that begs the body to spread horizontally. It frizzes and sits, vapor suspended as a ghost lubricating your steps in one minute and puddling your breath in another.

GATOR

The gator sparks androgynous danger through a croaking mating call. The popular predator, it is a reptile with an armored body. A mama gator gives birth after spring sex in a nest of vegetation. If her nest is 93 degrees Fahrenheit and above the baby is a boy, 86 and below the baby is a girl – anywhere in between is a mixed lot. Temperature rules reproduction, in a way provoking external choice and soullessly smoking out predestination.

SHELL

The scallop shell, many miles from the beach, is used to invert fertility by allowing a layer of rot to engulf it. A functional corpse, the shell waits to be repurposed and reinterpreted. Reproductive habits are to be admired, as scallops are (in significant numbers) hermaphrodites and transgendered.

CYPRESS KNEES

The cypress knees bob up as the phallic class, reminders of rigidity and strain. A cypress knee is the splurging root of a cypress tree. The knees rise up from beneath the tree and populate space above ground. Similar to the look of an erect penis they are named for being the height of one's knees. They are a scientific curiosity, as they serve no proven function. The knees lurk below the water and trip traverses as they wade.

STORM

The storm rumbles into the subtropics in a passionate flair, bringing stuff up. A schizophrenic metaphor of darkness desperately gussying a sense of emotional thoroughness in impeding bursts. Cementing spontaneity.

GLITTER

References to glitter are witnessed in beads on the reptile's skin, the water's surface and in the scattering of the sun. Glitter is affordable luxury, a so-called hyper feminine choice that accomplishes the subversive. Glitter exists in transfusive bits, spreading like man-made sand. Untamable, like the swamp, its lean toward both reflectivity and the exaggeratory cause an identity schism. The wearer is obscured, and the identity is constructed through amplification, proving performativity.

FROGS

The frogs are the genderless warriors, consummating in an ever-present hum.

The background audible reminder of reproduction. Frogs are sometimes asexual – a flippant frog choice. They sing the song of a swamp, a multiplying force of flexible aid.

PARTNERS

Of the most significance of the swamp-logic are the Lichen (a positive mold that grows on dead wood) and the Masked Figure (the physicality of a controlled body), who are opposing and conjoining parts of a whole that have been caught in a cycle of pedagogy and birth.

THE MASKED FIGURE



The masked figure is the physical ubiquity amongst the swampy body politic. She is the performative human presence, the oppositional-longing-for. Her exterior marks are experienced through costume: a mask and suits of armor. The body is blocked from dismembering.

The costumes are labored through an inversion of beauty and strength, referencing a personal and meta notion of religion (Catholicism + Santeria). Catholicism acts as a metonym for an introduction to oppression through magical thinking – a type of thinking that is infecting but malleable. Santeria, an Afro-Cuban religion hid itself in Catholic symbols to avoid persecution. Through meta impulses, the masked figure's faith in the outfit is constructed via a celestial mixture of absorption and softness. As her sex binds her to nature, she manipulates the haziness of ritualized anti-science to foster her ideology.

Softness is explored as powerful and as an alternative to violent rhetoric (a mode of domination and deflection). Against essentialist definitions, softness is a means to subvert. An alternative that melts and liquefies versus orders and denies. Construction is dealt with suggestively and material insists on transparency. Softness is about moving horizontally, in tune, instead of vertically, in conquest. It is about accessibility and intersectionality. To convey softness, the outfits are made from knit wool, trashed foam, chiffon, felt, hair, wax, glitter, and mold-painted scallop shells. The materials are labored through the consummate relationship between the softness and the hand. They are spun, felted, knit, melted

and sewn. The methods include craft processes that have seemingly existed forever, borrowed from ancient mothers encouraging of flexibility, perforation, and insulation.



She wears a mask. A latex mold of a non-descript face in which hair has been inserted through the thorough punching of a felting needle. It is a block of beauty and an initial foray into confusion and abjection (a root of desire) that questions orientation and separates from the body. According to Wikipedia (an encyclopedic stand-in for the every“man”), hair:

“ provides thermal regulation and camouflage for many animals; for others it provides signals to other animals such as warnings, mating, or other communicative displays...”¹³

¹³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hair>

A more specific type of hair is brought into conversation with this mask – pubic hair. The sentry to our sex. Of specific relevance due to it being a belabored choice for women: our beauty is of the utmost importance and paternal logic foresees the body as *meaning*, the body as catalogued and pre-ordained. A Google search of “women and pubic hair” brings these results: “What Guys Really Think About Your Pubic Hair”, “Here’s What Men Think About Women’s Pubic Hair”, “This Guy’s Not Ashamed To Admit He LOVES Bushy Pubic Hair”. And this fixation runs deep into phallogentric psychoanalysis; take Freud’s¹⁴ notes on femininity in which he begrudgingly links weaving with women while presuming a connection to pubic hair:

“It seems that women have made few contributions to the discoveries and inventions in the history of civilization; there is, however, one technique which they may have invented -- that of plaiting and weaving. If that is so, we should be tempted to guess the unconscious motive for the achievement. Nature herself would seem to have given the model which this achievement imitates by causing the growth at maturity of the pubic hair that conceals the genitals.”¹⁵

They are controversial, and the mask is reminiscent of the aforementioned.

Therefore, the intimacy of a face is guarded. The face has shape shifted.

¹⁴ “You can’t get to a place, to a society, that isn’t constructed according to the phallus. You’re stuck with a lot of loneliness, so how do you deal with that isolation and loneliness?” – Kathy Acker

¹⁵ <http://ww3.haverford.edu/psychology/ddavis/p109g/freudfem.html>



The first outfit worn by the masked figure is designed to reject fertility. It is a knit and purled garment paneled together to mimic chainmail and a cilice,¹⁶ a way to remember your chest. The yarn was spun from 7 pounds of wool. The sheep's gift was pulled and twisted – thinning through the careful caress of one thumb and one pointer finger, producing elasticity. An arch remains at the bottom, adorned with scallop shells¹⁷ and exposes the pubis.

The shells were collected on an island and then painted moldy (an exercise in reversal). Borrowing from a Santera, shells are used to divine the future, and through an invoked mold-power a quest for anti-fertility is perceived.

¹⁶ A cilice is a hair shirt, largely out of fashion now. It is to be worn by an ascetic.

¹⁷ A symbol of fertility, see: The Birth of Venus (Sandro Botticelli)



The second suit of armor summons a displaced sun. Made from a collection of memory foam it is covered in glitter, lichens, dirt, and wax that builds in nipple steeps where the wick is inserted. When the candles are ignited the suit becomes a process, exaggerating the duality of wax.¹⁸ The suit reflects the swamp heat aiming to mimic its shadow light via its own flickering.

¹⁸ Wax is an important material as its state changes from solid to liquid through illumination.



The third outfit models itself after a christening dress and a mosquito net. Made from lightweight chiffon, it filters the sun. This suit is designed for swamp entry, a slap of reality through self-conscious movement. Adorned with felted and painted lichens, the outfit pays homage to the growth of a relationship with the virtual lichen.



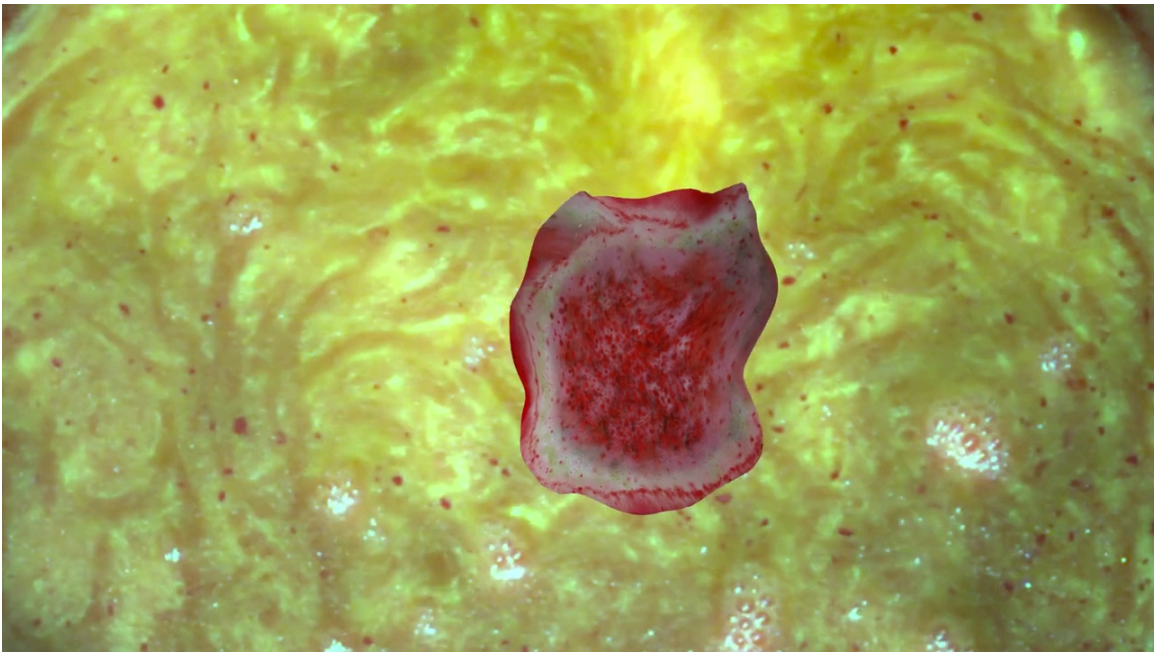
The final suit is outfitted in sharp, crushed shell points embedded into a nylon body stocking that holes out parts of the body. It was made to be birthed through the mush of the virtual lichen. An ensemble for the future that bangs out and fights back as a mold in the positive. Inside, as always, the figure's body is sparkling in body glitter, an integral component to the shape-shifting mantra.

Ultimately, The purpose of the masked figure is to recognize its singularity as a potential for escape. In doing so, it employs costume to trick and absorb the imposition of identity and to understand its affect and let it strain its way out.¹⁹ What the armor also suggests is a need for it. Thus, the masked figure's most important quality is its slippage. It is of the world – an old idea, holding unto to earthly magic but retaining wisdom. It is aware of the performance, where the vir-

¹⁹ nila nokizaru, "Against Gender, Against Society", Lies II (2016), 3 – 7.

tual lichen is without this consciousness, rather its singularity has not been colonized. Dually, the armor is a plan for attack, a maneuver for the readied that anticipates change through the collective unconscious.

The Virtual Lichen



The *cryptothecia rubrocincta*, or, the red lichen is a fungus found in subtropic locations. Particularly on cypress trees in a swamp.

Like mold (negative), the lichen (positive) is a eukaryote. Through symbiosis, the lichen grows on surfaces (lacking depth) containing dead wood (a slang term for an erect penis and through metaphor becoming the phallocentric).²⁰ Its red color is a defense mechanism and it reproduces through sunlight. Although little has been scientifically ensured about the specifics of the red lichen,²¹ it is common mythology that a lichen is an indicator of clean air, as it does not tolerate pollution.

Its poetry is compelling as an asexual positive mold that grows and covers the dead cypress. Thus, the lichen diffuses itself into the mascot, the primary explorer, imbued with special power inside of the virtual swampland. The lichen is without a body, without a sex, without a gender – an effervescent fungus. It grows gently into immortality.

The lichen is the wet wound, a slash of bumpy bright red growing in circles and splotches around a central greenish bruise. It is undeniable in color in both its virtuality and physicality. Reminiscent of a period stain, a fresh cut, and a smack of

²⁰ <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Wood&defid=174508>

²¹ <http://www.loyno.edu/lucec/natural-history-writings/christmas-wreath-lichen-cryptothecia-rubrocincta>

lipstick it is aggressive as it spreads its legs through time, taking time, transgressing time.

Moving slowly enough to become omnipresent, the comings and goings of the lichen is of little notice, and aging seems theoretically unimportant. Speaking concurrently about the new and old body, a fissure in society that favors the older testosterone over the older estrogen, the lichen age is felt through gained physicality versus frailed wisdom. The ancient oldness of the lichen is the slow newness of an alternative way of living. Our new/old body that is as fluid and gender-bending as the virtual lichen.

II REPRODUCTION II

The masked figure gives birth to the virtual lichen via the grace of assumed anti-fertility (different than infertility, anti-fertility is aware of birth as something productive versus natural.)²² The significance of the birth comes from its stance on reproduction. To give virtual birth is meant, in this respect, to displace the womb and disassociate it from naturalization through the process of subversive reproduction.

²² Wittig, Monique "One is not born a woman" (May 1980). Questions Féministes (Nouvelles Questions Féministes & Questions Feministes)

Fertility is tracked, individually and economically. It is felt like a weight, as a mode of control that objectifies with a time limit. The ability for a woman to be fertile, to *bear* children, plays into the binary of her assumed role in society. It exists as labor power in an effort to create a workforce in which the pregnant woman is an unconsidered tool. Think: mothers in Africa during the height of the slave trade,²³ or, post-fordian “homemakers” who reproduce comfort at home for their partner, for no wage,²⁴ or, the advent of mercantile capitalism which rationalized the body into a machine for production through the guise of “scientific reason” and thus regulated the uterus.²⁵ It also exists in the opposite, as a tool for sterilization, mostly targeting poor women of color.²⁶

²³ “For the supply to be guaranteed, slave traders had to steal African boys and girls from their mothers. Though female reproductive work was not directly organized by a state, the burden of reproducing a mobile, gendered, and racialized workforce fell on African women, *in Africa*. The source of “production” of a bonded workforce was there. Yet the African women who bore and nurtured the more than 15 million Africans (and this number represents the number of those *who arrived*—it does not take into account those who died en route) are totally forgotten.” - Françoise Vergès, “Like a Riot: The Politics of Forgetfulness, Relearning the South, and the Island of Dr. Moreau”, http://www.documenta14.de/en/south/25_like_a_riot_the_politics_of_forgetfulness_relearning_the_south_and_the_island_of_dr_moreau

²⁴ Nicole Cox, and Silvia Federici. “Counter-planning from the kitchen: wages for housework : a perspective on capital and the Left” (New York: New York Wages for Housework Committee 1976)

²⁵ Silvia Federici, “Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation” (Autonomedia 2004) 133-192.

²⁶ “The police learned that every year since 1966, in a clinic owned by a Dr. Moreau, 6,000 to 8,000 women had been given abortions without their consent. They entered Dr. Moreau’s clinic three to seven months pregnant; they left after their abortions commenced, many also sterilized. They were sent to the clinic by colonial government institutions in charge of birth control and prenatal care.” – *ibid.* 23

Giving birth is sticky, stuck with the complex baggage of mother objectification. In a patriarchal, capitalist order her womb is exploited, becoming a territory for politics, economics, and religion.

Thus, the swamp becomes the ungendered and non-essential womb. A space lifted out of human fertility. The womb is the origin, an alternative to the sun's reign in this patriarchy, but it does not have to be essential or machine. Reproduction is "in theory". It is repetition, transferred meaning, the collective, support, and disbursement. The swamp model explores virtual birth, becoming a play on Immaculate Conception, in which dirty magic is valued over the immaculate. Virtual birth inverts the weight of fertility and the fever to conceive (a breathing baby).²⁷ It instead pushes the process to solo – forgoing rigidity and reproducing in singularity.

Virtual Birth aligns itself with Karen Barad's Agential Realism²⁸ in the sense that birth is surrounded by phenomena that perverts it's understanding and is con-

²⁷ "Now, I loved my hard-won baby-to-be, but I was in no way ready to bow out of this vale of tears for his survival. Nor do I think those who love me would have looked too kindly on such a decision – a decision that doctors everywhere on the globe are mandated to make, and that the die hard antiabortionists are going for here" – Maggie Nelson, "The Argonauts" (Graywolf Press 2015), 93

²⁸ An expansion of discursive boundaries – the "intra-action" between phenomena is constantly producing meaning in a layered, equal manner.

stantly changing based on the intra-action enacting itself within the girth of birth. The objective, or more precisely, what is the objective, what is the subjective, and what is the referent, remains hierarchically undetermined. Remembering the aforementioned, the apparatus used in the birth process “the so-called object”, the politics swarming around it “the so-called culture”, and the physicality of the gender of the baby “the so-called nature” are equally instrumental in the notion of reproduction. Barad uses the example of the sonogram machine; as it genders a baby before birth, which is contingent on social politics. If it weren’t for the machine, the gender would remain elusive, however, if it weren’t for the politic the gender wouldn’t exist in a strict natural binary. Because the phenomena surrounding birth is abstract and ever changing, it allows realities to shift via the inversion of meaning, stress, and language.²⁹ The reality of the sonogram machine shifts when its phenomena is recalibrated – “reality is not composed of thing-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena, but things-in-phenomena”.³⁰

Holding on to this perspective, the demonized body-politic inherent in anti-abortion rhetoric can transfer via the inversion of the social and physical phenomena surrounding conception. In virtual birth – termination is always the answer because the physicality of the baby never materializes.

²⁹ Karen Barad, “Getting Real: Technoscientific Practices and the Materialization of Reality” (2001) 1 – 42.

³⁰ibid 29.

When assessing the intra-action of reproduction, its role in the formation of identity is significant. Identity is a cultural construct and the monolithic heteronormative conceptions of the sex/gender/desire triangle can be poked at through thoughtful acts of reproduction (the critical repeat). Repetition has the power to be subversive by delegitimizing authenticity and thus naturalization. Reproduction as repetition asserts a process and a process asserts room for confusion of the original.³¹

The swamp model avows birth as a metaphor for choice, shifting child conception as primarily a function of the immaterial that discounts nature and severs blood ties. Here, birth can seek to diminish reproductive labor. Here, birth mimics the action (the holes) and rewrites the information. Online you support your virtual lichen through consciousness where domesticity slips away.

Reproduction is in crisis mode and can be picked at. And through virtuality and swamp logic, it will be untangled. The swamp understands the radical spawn as a product of reproduction and decomposition, it blurs classifications with the hybrid.

³¹ Judith Butler, "Gender Trouble" (Routledge 1999), 45 – 49.

III THE CYBORG GODDESS HYBRID III



The hybrid (the radicalized spawn) is the monster metaphor. It exists as a symbol of those who have been othered. Going backwards, the idea of the monster was smacked unto women during capitalism's infantile cries in the age of enlightenment. Capitalists used naturalization, objectification and stigma as a tool for reproductive labor and oppression.

A monster is something that percolates around a feared realm of hybridity (part nature / part culture, part beast / part human). In the relative contemporary, pop culture gives us several examples of the female monster. Some of which are: the

alien mother from *Alien*,³² Saartjie Baartman,³³ Kathy Acker's Janey Smith,³⁴ Nicki Minaj in "Anaconda",³⁵ and Caitlyn Jenner.³⁶ Although, a few of the above examples are employed to transgress the stigma, the monster metaphor is largely part of efforts to maintain kyarchy. A woman is most likely branded as monster in the pejorative – an enigmatic beast that is seemingly natural, but frighteningly against normalcy. PMS is terrifying to the unexperienced as mood swings suggest a break in the hierarchy of life, a tailspin into living horizontally.

The monster is abject. She is representative of the natural unnatural, a correlative to the observer but more repulsive than uncanny. Described by Julia Kristeva: "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite"³⁷ The registered abject becomes

³² A wet, secreting mother beast.

³³ A Khoikhoi woman sold into slavery as a sideshow attraction due to her body. Offensively nicknamed the "hottentot venus" to exploit her body shape as a signifier of fertility.

³⁴ Janey Smith as a 10 year old oedipal sex addict – Kathy Acker, "Blood and Guts in High School" (Grove Press 1994).

³⁵ In her music video. "Anaconda" Minaj shifts between an object of desire to a growling force – subversively exaggerating "woman as monster"

³⁶ As the seemingly most visible trans woman in 2015, Caitlyn Jenner was repeatedly exploited and picked apart in the media as a plastic surgery monster.

³⁷ Julia Kristeva, "Powers of Horror An Essay on Abjection" (Columbia University Press 1982).

a reaction to the blurry semiotic (the monster) – a violent glitch that threatens to melt our homogenous and heteronormative rigidity.

Arguably the most powerful and ruminating monster metaphor comes from the witch-hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that witnessed the belabored executions of hundreds of thousands of women. The “witch” archetype developed by her hunter is today characterized as status quo femininity (weak (seduced into putting her name in the devil’s book), over-sexualized, and in service of a man.) AKA: a means of oppression within the rigidity of patriarchy that emphasized the binary and instilled men with a fundamental fear in the power of women. A witch, almost always a woman, was probably of a lower class removed from the overseeing of infantile capitalism. She may have been organizing with other women in friendship or rebellion. She was more often than not a midwife, and had an interest and ability to assert power over her own body and reproductive labor. The witch, through unreasoned magic, was a monstrous destroyer of men and a curse of impotency and castration (a supposed source of a man’s inability to succeed or dominate.) But even within this supposed power, she was the slave of the newly developed singular “devil.” Her agency and perversions so palpable that they were inconceivable, doubling back to be in immaterial service to the gendered god-opposite.³⁸ The witch prior to persecution is a woman with

³⁸ Ibid 25.

agency who is not an object of the male class, and after is a woman mesmerized by hierarchical evil.

Thus, the image of the witch can be metabolized in contemporary culture. Her monstrosity is subversion and a reminder of the potential to riot. Modern witches: Nicki Minaj, Mary Shelley, and Kathy Acker, use being a monster as powerful suggesting a newness that forms coalitions with the human-proximate. To become a monster is to queer oneself into a realm of label ambiguity.

Therefore, with swamp logic in mind, I also propose the cyborg-goddess hybrid as a fourth-wave³⁹ feminist solution and a subversion of the monster metaphor. A comingling of the swamp informatics (witchy physicality) and the opening up of space that living virtually provides. A reification that may elude masturbatory instincts through the anti-trace of the body. However, its version of the goddess also neglects the capitalist impulse to mechanize the body for labor by adhering to the lessons of the natural mysteries of the swamp. The hybrid is a metaphorical suggestion of living in non-physical space and challenging blankets of identity in a way that can concurrently translate to the physical world, and circumvent confrontation through transcendence. A room of one's own to be multiplied without agitators.

³⁹ The fourth wave of feminism shifts the third wave to online space, where hierarchies are redefined through accessibility and social media.

In the transitional space between the second and third wave, Donna Haraway wrote "The Cyborg Manifesto" in a moment desperate for intersectionality. With the manifesto, she announced, "I'd rather be a cyborg than a goddess" and foretold the possibilities of new technologies as a way to further break-down identity issues within feminism that have prevented women to organize as a class.

Twelve years later as the computer became more intuitive, Elizabeth Grosz envisioned its space as extending our situations of living and thus lubricating the ability to expand consciousness via the flexibility of imagining space digitally. She called for a feminist-coded reformulation. In-between this time, cyberfeminism amongst artists was in brew and the VNS Matrix catalyzed online possibilities by reclaiming computers as belonging to a space outside of contemporary patriarchy.

"We are the modern cunt
positive anti reason
unbounded unleashed unforgiving
we see art with our cunt we make art with our cunt
we believe in jouissance madness holiness and poetry
we are the virus of the new world disorder
rupturing the symbolic from within
saboteurs of big daddy mainframe
the clitoris is a direct line to the matrix
VNS MATRIX
terminators of the moral codes
mercenaries of slime
go down on the altar of abjection
probing the visceral temple we speak in tongues
infiltrating disrupting disseminating
corrupting the discourse
we are the future cunt"

And thus, images of a future where technology, computers, and the internet existed within a feminist consciousness was formed.

However, it seems that this emphatic belief in the justice of computers has thinned out. The freedom of its beginnings are being stilted by the hierarchical ordering of its content. In a 2014 interview, Virginia Barratt of the VNS Matrix explains the fall: “What happened, of course, was that the narratives around liberation from racism, sexism and so on in the brave new virtual world were promises which were empty. New strategies needed to be developed for battling rampant bullying, bigotry, hatespeech and so on.”⁴⁰ The neo-liberal empire has succeeded in infiltrating the web – and turned it into, of course, a non-breathing venture for capitalism.

The image shows the header and navigation bar of the website "A Voice for Men". The logo features a stylized red "M" with a black outline, followed by the text "A Voice for Men" in black, and the tagline "CHANGING THE CULTURAL NARRATIVE" in red below it. The navigation bar is a dark grey horizontal strip with four white text links: "NEWS", "BULLETINS", "EDUCATION", and "SUPPORT AVFM!". Below the navigation bar, the "NEWS" section is visible, listing several articles with their titles and dates. To the right of the news section, there are two prominent call-to-action buttons: a blue one that says "BECOME A SUBSCRIBING MEMBER" and an orange one that says "ONE-TIME DONATION AND OTHER SUPPORT OPTIONS".

A Voice for Men
CHANGING THE CULTURAL NARRATIVE

NEWS BULLETINS EDUCATION SUPPORT AVFM!

NEWS

Västra Götaland Parliament:
Genital mutilation of boys is OK 1 week ago

Romanian Parliament adopts
International Men's Day 3 months ago

The best Christmas story ever 4 months ago

[All News>>](#)

BULLETINS

The Voice of Europe – Episode 120 – When ideology suppresses all reality 2 weeks ago

The Voice of Europe – Episode 119 – When the state tortures children 3 weeks ago

@CaptainMikul wants some attention 4 weeks ago

[All Bulletins>>](#)

EDUCATION

AVFM NA: Jimmy Kimmel and Roosh need to talk 4 months ago

AVFM Interviews Theryn Meyer 4 months ago

BCP PUA The "art" of begging for pussy 4 months ago

[All Videos>>](#)

SUPPORT AVFM!

[BECOME A SUBSCRIBING MEMBER](#)

[ONE-TIME DONATION AND OTHER SUPPORT OPTIONS](#)

With online space in mind, the cyborg-goddess hybrid is interested in addressing these neoliberal wrought concerns, in order to inspire language shifts in how we

⁴⁰ <http://motherboard.vice.com/read/an-oral-history-of-the-first-cyberfeminists-vns-matrix>

construct and oppress identity in the context of the human body. Hito Steyerl, the Laboria Cuboniks collective, and Juliana Huxtable are artists who are taking lengths to reconjugate virtual space as an abolitionist feminist project.

In Steyerl's "Cut! Reproduction and Recombination (A Kiss)"⁴¹ she muses in the significance of labor power and post-fordian economics in terms of editing techniques used in film. Through this analysis of the industrialization of our economies a connection is made to how our bodies also bear this change, which is worked out through its absorption in our entertainment (our films). Post-production exists, and therefore, hyperrealisms in films exist. However, the re-coding of post-production editing and CGI can cultivate virtual breaks with the specific purpose to alter our notions of reality.

Cue the cuts of our bodies, as the cyborg-goddess hybrid we can telepresent via the ease of the green screen and give birth through DIY CGI in an effort to radicalize the spawn. However, this scary anonymity of the singular online body should be regarded with sensitivity. This body must contort and acknowledge technology without forgetting the humanity of the collective. The meanings of post-production must be inverted, and then reality can be altered in the breath of a swamp-trust. The manipulation of CGI allows you to become the lichen, to be-

⁴¹ Hito Steyerl, "Cut! Reproduction and Recombination (A Kiss)" in e-flux journal : The Wretched of the Screen (Sternberg Press 2013), 176 – 189.

come the frogs that prevail over the cypress knees and to inject the screen with your politic that remains stimulated by warm blood.

In the Xenofeminist Manifesto, Laboria Cuboniks asserts that “XF mutates, navigates and probes every horizon. Anyone who’s been deemed unnatural in the face of reigning biological forms, anyone who’s experienced injustices wrought in the name of natural order, will realize that the glorification of “nature” has nothing to offer us...”⁴² Their politics of alienation takes lengths to proclaim autonomy through the repurposing of technology. Although singularity could be pushed in the negative, the strongest effort of the XF Manifesto is in its recognition of the denaturalization of our identities, as the “natural” human body is a corrupt playing field that is bound by political phenomenon that hoards and controls. Our bodies seem to be unfit, trapped in multiple paradoxes of sexualization and rampant disgust. To adhere to the politics of alienation is to revisit cyborg theory and to imagine subversive repetition through technology.

⁴² <http://www.laboriacuboniks.net/>

I ALWAYS PICKED THE GIRLS WHEN I PLAYED VIDEO GAMES. IF FOR NO OTHER REASON, THAN OUT OF SHEER SPITE AT THE EASE OF IDENTIFICATION THE BOYS AROUND ME HAD WITH THEIR UN-INTERESTINGLY PHALLIC/KAMEHAMEHA SUPER-HEROES... WITH THE ASSUMPTION THAT THERE WAS SOME SORT OF INHERENT OR TRAGIC FLAW IN PRINCESS PEACH'S MARIO KART 64 PERFORMANCE. CHUN-LI'S ABSURD CURVES AND THE CUNT'S MEOW SCREECHING FROM EVERY TURN OF HER HYPER-PORNOGRAPHIC BODY FUELED MY RAGE AGAINST BOYHOOD, ALBEIT THROUGH ARGUABLY THE MOST 'BOYISH' OF MEANS. I DISCOVERED, USING MY VIRTUAL PUSSY TO STRADDLE THE BEEFY TRAPEZIUSES OF ANTHROPOMORPHIC CYBORG ATTACKERS, THAT THE AWKWARD SHORTCOMINGS OF PUBESCENT LIFE COULD BE OVERCOME ONE PELVIC HEAD CRUSH AT A TIME. LIKE MOTOKO KUSANAGI, MY WOMANHOOD WAS ENTIRELY ARTIFICIAL, SAVE MY MIND AND THE TINGLING SENSATION IN MY SPINE PRESENT AT THE REVELATION OF A NEW LEVEL, ESPECIALLY ONE UNLOCKED AS A SECRET—EACH TIME MY ARTIFICIAL LUNGS LIFTED INTO THE AIR AS IF I WAS ÆON, BRAVELY DENYING VERTIGO OF ITS AFFECT AS I SPREAD MY AMAZONIAN LEGS AND TAKE IN THE RAPIDLY MOVING AIR THAT TRACES THE FANTASTICAL SKYSCRAPERS OF BREGNA. IMMERSSED IN A WORLD OF POST-APOCALYPTIC INDUSTRIAL WAR-ZONES, I ASSUMED THE ETHICAL AND POLITICAL TASK OF FIGHTING OFF THE TENTACLE AGGRESSION OF HENTAI RAPE AND THE CHUCKLES OF MY PEERS SIMULTANEOUSLY. I WENT TO EVERY LAN PARTY IN HOPES THAT I COULD WITNESS THEM LOSE BATTLE AFTER BATTLE TO HYPERBOLIC DEPICTIONS OF THE SAME FIGURES THEY WOULD LATER JERK OFF TO; THE SAME FEAR-INSPIRING FEMME FATALE'S WHO THEY WOULD, AT SOME POINT ATTEMPT TO BATTLE IN THE REAL; THE SAME IMAGINARY CUNTS AND PHANTASTICAL PUSSIES THAT WOULD (AND STILL DO) TEMPT THEM TO TOUCH AND CONQUER THE VITAMIN-ENRICHED TUNA OF MY BODY.

Juliana Huxtable uses cyborg dialogue to emphasize her efforts in blurring the gender and sexuality binary. Her fluidity as the subtext to her art investigates a future world that creates the alternative ego: "cyborg, cunt, priestess, witch, Nu-waubian princess."⁴³ The intersectionality of her projects can only exist through a consummation of the hybrid.

Resolutely, the cyborg-goddess hybrid is a mutation of feminist beliefs that link the camaraderie of ecofeminists with the radical hybridity of technofeminists. It conjures a metaphorical nature that sidesteps pervading ethics of domination and

⁴³ <http://www.vice.com/read/artist-juliana-huxtables-journey-from-scene-queen-to-trans-art-star-456>

fosters a place for empowerment. This facilitation of fluidity is mimicked in the virtual lichen and frogs that exist in the *Sweaty Mother Slow Groove* video. The internet is a version of a swamp – and the swamp is the witchy unnatural to the “civilized world” as we know it.

By embracing the swamp politic one stirs down into the muck and constructs a deformed body, the virtual body. We are lichens growing slowly to suggest clean air and attempting to demystify the sneak of corporate feminism.⁴⁴ The cyborg-goddess rejects the consummation of the marketplace and feminism because the hybrid is a product of sinking mud. The swampy, virtual body is a manifesto of ambivalence which multiplies online through coalition in lieu of the versions of multiplicity that neoliberalism inscribes on the web via a variety of “choices”.

The hybrid as a representation of the swamp argues for a non-dominant space – a space that is not gendered. A space that is constantly morphing with symbols that have been recontextualized and disavows the myth of womanhood as defined by man.⁴⁵ A non-polarizing space that puts stake in the ambiguity of the virtual swamp.

⁴⁴ See: Pantene Pro-V “not sorry” commercial (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p73-30IE-XE>), Sheryl Sandberg’s lean-in theory (<http://www.thefeministwire.com/2013/10/17973/>), and Taylor Swift (http://battymamzelle.blogspot.com/2014/01/About-That-Time-I-Pissed-Off-White-Feminism.html#.VxWMvD_c2CI).

⁴⁵ Luce Irigaray, *“Speculum of the Other Woman”* (Cornell University Press 1985).

An example of the swamp-politic via the hybrid in action can be experienced through the video's re-contextualization of the sun. Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" is widely interpreted as an allegory of free thought, but the sun(/son) belongs to a freedom manicured by systems of oppression.⁴⁶ By aligning the origin of the educated thought with the vision of the sun, the night (the womb)⁴⁷ becomes defined only in the sun's terms. In the context of virtual space the sun can be re-conjugated. In a swamp, one's experience of the sun is broken up into flashes that can be equally experienced through shadows. It glitters in spots and is immateriality without monolithic assumption. The sun perceives its powers via lightness (whiteness/goodness). But what is waiting in its foil (the shadows) is in an occluded realm that has yet to be totally defined – the deep abyss of disappearance / total engulfment / costumatic invisibility/ unconstructed identity. These qualities translate virtually while the sun sets, it is a non-essential to viewing a screen.

Virtual space is put together like a weave. A motherboard is similar to the partnership between sheep and hand. As in spinning yarn, there is a meticulous picking apart to then put back together (to construct). It is intermingling between separate bodies – a coalition, an alliance and a rallying anonymity. It is up to the

⁴⁶ Kaja Silverman, "World Spectators" (Stanford University Press 2000).

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Bronfen, "The Powers of Insomnia", *The Insomnia Drawings* (Scalo Publishers 2001)

fourth wave and the swamp to keep that weave ethical and combat the corrupted space of the virtual.

IN CONCLUSION

DISEMBODIMENT PARADOX

An acknowledgement of the virtual swamp leads to an acknowledgement of, simultaneously, an extinguishing of the body as we know it. A body that re-formats its experience.

In the contemporary moment, body-positivity emanates in an effort to desexualize, admit, and give access to the female/queer body, the black body, and the non-abled body. Thus, the dehumanizing quality of disembodiment cannot be ignored. A human body with sensuality and sensitivity can be implicit in the crushing of modes of oppression. 24/7 tele-presenting could be understood in the negative, understood as the impartial, atrophied body. Therefore, how do we use an immaterial body to constitute radical change?

The virtual body (the lichen) in the swamp model begins to view the body as a process rather than a site. It becomes a place for cerebral consciousness expansion, and a collaboration of sorts. A human(e) future coalition that is without boundaries and labels and performs as an embrace of transformation without

stigma.⁴⁸ We are disembodying through the hope of metaphor and liberation – a way to escape the experience of being deduced to it. Disembodying through the cyborg-goddess hybrid initiates an exchange of living and an alternative body politic.

To disembody through the swamp model is to engage in magical thinking, where magical thinking becomes a way to circumvent pragmatics and entertain the celestial – the alien. To “make-up” means to challenge contemporary narratives. The suspicious faith in swamp-power subverts religious thinking in the way that Santeria subverts Catholicism: a transgressive cover-up. To engage in these beliefs is to be anti-capitalist. The logic of magic abides an unknowable power fostered through ritual versus the “regularization of the labor process”.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ A stigmatized view of transformation would be plastic surgery.

⁴⁹ Ibid 25. (142)



An example of counter-narrative disembodiment is the journey embarked upon by the lovers: Genesis P-Orridge and Lady Jaye. GP and LJ were partners so totally in love that they committed to becoming parts of the same consciousness and thus recognized this feat as a movement and manifesto. First, they physically altered their bodies through cosmetic surgery to mirror each other's appearance and thus began referring to themselves as only parts of each other and never in the singular. Although technology stilted them at physical and language transformation, they believed through death and the relinquishment of their bodies they would become pure consciousness – the pandroyne:

“We never thought of it as transitioning as much as evolution... we wanted to demonstrate that the human body is not the person... the mind is the person. And ultimately the body's supposed to be discarded altogether, and we become

pure consciousness, that's our belief...and so this is a step symbolizing the beginning of seeing the species differently, and looking towards an ultimate future where there is no either/or, and ultimately there is no body, there's just divine thought, and divine consciousness.

See, we want to be together without bodies. You know, Lady Jaye's already dropped her body, as we say. And we've made a pact that if it's at all possible, we want to find each other's consciousness and then blend into one being, the Pandrogyn, that's neither of us, both of us combined."

There are limitations to the physical body – it is defined through external processes and social constructs, and it is defined via lack.⁵⁰ It is the paradox of the xx body, to liberate it within the same language that was constructed to objectify it as a product of the male class. Tele-presence is more than a conference call in the globalized world; it is the mystical notion of phantasmagoric relationships between the body and its projection. We can use the wisdom of the masked figure to define the "soul" of technology. To breach it in a way that acknowledges its spirituality and its non-denominational divine presence in our contemporary world. AKA the recognition of the ethical, political, and human agency reflected in technology.

It is possible to discover living without a body without repressing empathy. Although a mired narrative, its onslaught would be slow, moving through our vocabulary and existing as the alternative origin. Judith Butler established precedence for the subversive reproduction of our identity and our bodies: performativity im-

⁵⁰ Ibid 45.

plies complexity. Virtual disembodiment does the aforementioned, it morphs and obscures, it repeats the cyborg and the goddess, and it seeks to honor the metaphor and invert our conceptions about the body. An alternative that melts and liquefies versus orders and denies. When woman is defined via man (via patriarchy) all symbols become unjust and convoluted. The new origin of disembodiment is a way to rid us of this trajectory. The reconstruction of new/old symbols (cyborg, goddess, swamp, sun, birth) is the disembodiment. Admit that you have a body, admit that you need your body to live, admit that your body is different from his body – reinvent the body.

For our body no longer needs to be relegated to landscape, it is a process of evolution that is beyond Darwin. Becoming the lichen, or using the swamp in virtual language is more than being a cyborg, it is about rioting with the suggestive and committing oneself to soft rhetoric. It is an intersectional battleground that will see a future where the powers that be are overthrown. We are transforming into fluidity, we are unearthing our mating call of reproductive power, which is the power of origin, the power of transgression, the power of softness, and the power of swamp.

(sweatymotherslowgroove.com)



IMAGE LIST

- 1 The Metropolitan Cathedral of the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven
- 2 Google image search (white man + mosquito)
- 3 Humid orifice and a tannic slough in Sanibel, Florida
- 4 Sweaty Mother Slow Groove still
- 5 Sweaty Mother Slow Groove still
- 6 Anti-Fertility Suit and The Birth of Venus overlaid with mold
- 7 Sun Heat Suit
- 8 Sweaty Mother Slow Groove still and Lichen Language Gown
- 9 Radical Spawn Outfit
- 10 Sweaty Mother Slow Groove still
- 11 Red Lichen apparent on tree in a Gainesville swamp
- 12 Cyborg-Goddess office informatics
- 13 Men's Rights homepage screenshot
- 14 Juliana Huxtable manifesto
- 15 Genesis P-Orridge and Lady Jaye in transition
- 16 Sweaty Mother Slow Groove installation view

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